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Teachers' Difficulties in Teaching Simple Composition Writing in Elementary School: A Qualitative Descriptive Study

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Abstract: Teaching simple composition writing requires teachers to coordinate planning, modeling, idea generation, language support, differentiation, time management, and assessment. Previous studies have commonly emphasized student writing outcomes or the effectiveness of particular media and strategies, while fewer studies examine the teacher's difficulties across the complete writing process in a natural elementary classroom. This qualitative descriptive study investigated the forms of difficulty experienced by a Grade IV teacher, the internal and external factors contributing to those difficulties, and the efforts used to address them at SDN Jatisari II, Bekasi City. The main informant was one classroom teacher selected purposively. Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation, and were analyzed through data reduction, display, and conclusion verification. The teacher experienced difficulties designing process-oriented worksheets, supporting idea generation and elaboration, expanding vocabulary and sentence construction, managing mixed abilities and attention, completing writing within approximately thirty minutes, and providing detailed assessment. The findings show that teacher difficulty is an interaction between pedagogical demands and available classroom support. Improvement requires staged writing tasks, explicit modeling, differentiated scaffolding, distributed writing time, focused feedback, revision opportunities, and school-level literacy resources.

Keywords: Teacher Difficulties, Simple Composition Writing, Writing Instruction, Elementary School, Differentiated Scaffolding.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a complex literacy activity because students must transform experience, knowledge, and language into a coherent written message. Even a simple elementary composition requires topic selection, idea generation, organization, vocabulary retrieval, sentence construction, transcription, punctuation, and rereading. For this reason, elementary writing instruction cannot be reduced to assigning a topic and collecting a finished product. Students need opportunities to observe writing processes, practice them with support, receive feedback, and revise.

Research on early writing indicates that explicit instruction improves composition, but effects depend on what is taught and how instruction is organized. Kim et al. (2021) found in a meta-analysis of primary-grade writing interventions that multicomponent instruction

produced stronger outcomes than narrow instructional approaches, particularly for students with weaker initial writing skills. This evidence is consistent with a process-oriented view in which transcription, text generation, planning, and self-regulation need to be coordinated rather than treated as unrelated skills.

The teacher's task becomes more demanding in heterogeneous classrooms. Some students can quickly generate ideas but need help with spelling and sentence boundaries, while others struggle to begin because they lack vocabulary, background knowledge, or a clear event sequence. Differentiation is therefore not an optional enrichment strategy. It is part of basic writing pedagogy because the same open-ended prompt can impose very different cognitive demands on different learners. Practical differentiation may include varied planning frames, word banks, model sentences, visual prompts, flexible grouping, and short teacher conferences.

Planning tools are especially important for novice writers. A worksheet that only states 'write a composition' transfers almost all planning responsibility to the student. In contrast, process-oriented worksheets can separate the task into manageable stages such as generating key words, answering who-where-when-what questions, sequencing events, drafting, rereading, and revising. Evidence-based analyses of early writing curricula show that strong instruction should provide explicit opportunities for composing as well as transcription and language development, rather than relying on isolated grammar exercises (Gabas et al., 2023).

Visual media can reduce abstraction during idea generation. Pictures and picture sequences give students observable content that can be named, ordered, and expanded into sentences. However, visual media are instructional only when they are linked to cognitive action. A colorful image can attract attention without necessarily helping students plan a text. Teachers need to convert the image into a writing scaffold through questions, key words, sequencing, oral rehearsal, and modeling. Technology can also support elementary writing, but a meta-analysis shows that effects vary according to how technology is integrated and the type of writing task (Wen & Walters, 2022).

Oral interaction provides another bridge into writing. Discussion allows children to test ideas before committing them to text. Dialogic writing approaches in upper elementary education show that talking about drafts and rewriting can support writing development when students are given structured opportunities to explain and reconsider their choices (Bouwer & van der Veen, 2024). In the present classroom, discussion and shared reading were already used, suggesting that the central issue is not simply whether interactive strategies occur, but how clearly they are connected to individual planning, drafting, and revision.

Time and assessment create additional pressure. The source classroom allocated approximately thirty minutes for completing a composition. Such a period may be sufficient for a short product for some students but is restrictive when students are expected to generate ideas, draft, reread, revise, and edit while also receiving individual assistance. When all stages are compressed into one short session, the instructional orientation can shift from learning how to write toward merely finishing a product. This is problematic because revision and feedback are central to writing development.

Feedback itself must be actionable. Research shows that students benefit when feedback is aligned with the level of the writing problem and when learners have an opportunity to use it in revision (Scherer et al., 2024). Expert teachers also make complex reasoning decisions when responding to elementary students' drafts, balancing content, organization, language, and developmental priorities (Ballock & McQuitty, 2023). For novice writers, marking every error can overload attention. A focused approach that identifies one strength and one or two priorities can make assessment more instructional.

Previous Indonesian studies have examined reading interest, Think Talk Write, visual media, and multimedia as ways to improve writing or engagement (Dery & Putra, 2019; Hapsari & Zulherman, 2021; Novrizta, 2018). These studies provide useful strategies, but they do not fully explain the teacher's experience across planning, implementation, scaffolding, time

management, and assessment in one classroom. The present study addresses that gap by placing teacher difficulty at the center of analysis. It asks: (1) What difficulties does the teacher experience when teaching simple composition writing? (2) What internal and external factors contribute to these difficulties? (3) What efforts are used, and what improvements are pedagogically indicated by the evidence? The novelty lies in conceptualizing teacher difficulty as a system-level interaction between instructional demands, student diversity, time, materials, assessment, and school support rather than as an individual teacher deficit.

METHODS

The study used a qualitative descriptive approach to understand the teacher's experience and classroom conditions in their natural setting. The study did not manipulate instruction or compare experimental groups. It was conducted in Grade IV.B at SDN Jatisari II, Jatiasih District, Bekasi City, during the first semester of the 2026/2027 academic year.

The main informant was one Grade IV.B classroom teacher who taught Indonesian language and was purposively selected because of direct involvement in planning, implementing, guiding, and assessing simple composition writing. The teacher's identity is represented by code G1. Student activity and student writing were used as supporting evidence to understand classroom conditions, not as quantitative outcome data.

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation. Interview topics included planning, instructional methods, media, types of difficulty, contributing factors, student responses, assessment, and teacher efforts. Observation focused on opening activities, prewriting, drafting, guidance, classroom management, time use, assessment, and closure. Secondary data included lesson plans or modules, student worksheets, textbooks, PowerPoint materials, images, student compositions, and available classroom documentation.

Data were analyzed interactively through reduction, display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Evidence was coded into themes related to planning, implementation, scaffolding, media, student characteristics, time, assessment, internal factors, external factors, and teacher efforts. Trustworthiness was strengthened through technique triangulation across interviews, observations, and documentation, and source triangulation through comparison of the teacher's account with classroom activity and documents. The study maintained confidentiality of student identities and interpreted the evidence within the boundaries of one classroom context.

Table 1. Research Focus, Main Indicators, Evidence, and Analysis

Focus	Main indicators	Evidence	Analytic emphasis
Teacher difficulties	Lesson devices, worksheets, media, methods, guidance, time, class management, assessment	Interview, observation, documentation	Coding and thematic grouping
Internal factors	Strategy variation, media development, time management, differentiation, assessment readiness	Interview, teaching documents	Relations among pedagogical themes
External factors	Student vocabulary, reading habits, attention, mixed ability, materials, time constraints	Observation, student work, interview	Triangulation of classroom demands
Teacher efforts	Contextual topics, pictures, reading, questioning, group discussion, motivation, follow-up	Interview, observation, documentation	Synthesis of existing practice and needed improvement

Source: Research data (2026)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Planning Was Curriculum-Aligned but Not Fully Process-Oriented

The teacher prepared curriculum-related components such as learning outcomes, learning objectives, learning sequences, and a lesson plan or teaching module. Contextual topics including holidays, hobbies, home activities, and everyday experiences were selected to activate students' background knowledge. This was a useful starting point because familiar content can reduce the burden of inventing a topic from nothing.

The main planning difficulty was designing student worksheets that guided the writing process rather than simply requiring a final composition. Available media consisted mainly of the student textbook, simple PowerPoint slides, and pictures. These resources could support explanation but did not consistently make the sequence from prewriting to drafting, revising, and editing visible. The difference is pedagogically important. Administrative planning establishes curriculum alignment, while process-oriented planning specifies the support that helps a student move from an idea to a revisable text.

Recent writing research supports this distinction. Gabas et al. (2023) found that evidence-based writing curricula need explicit opportunities for composing and related writing components. Kim et al. (2021) similarly reported stronger outcomes for multicomponent writing instruction. For this classroom, a more functional worksheet would include prompts for generating ideas, a small planning map, event sequence, optional vocabulary, drafting space, and a short revision checklist.

Implementation Still Positioned Writing Mainly as a Final Task

Instruction included explanation, dictation, shared or turn-taking reading, questions and answers, pictures, and independent writing. These methods connected several language skills, but writing largely occurred after explanation as the final task. Students therefore had limited opportunity to observe how a writer generates, selects, and develops ideas in real time.

Teacher modeling could make this process more visible. For example, the teacher could think aloud while examining a picture, write three key words, organize them into an event sequence, draft an opening sentence, and then revise one sentence for clarity. Such modeling reduces the hidden cognitive demands of writing. It also gives students a concrete process to imitate before they are expected to work independently.

Pictures increased student interest, but their planning function was not yet fully developed. A picture becomes a writing scaffold when students use it to identify actors, actions, setting, time, sequence, and feelings, not when it is merely displayed. This interpretation is consistent with technology and multimedia research showing that tools are most productive when integrated into a clear instructional sequence rather than added as decorative features (Wen & Walters, 2022; Hapsari & Zulherman, 2021).

Mixed Ability Increased the Demand for Individual Scaffolding

The most frequent classroom challenge was helping students begin and elaborate ideas. Some students produced only a few sentences even when the topic was familiar. The teacher responded with additional questions, examples, and repeated explanation. This created a delicate instructional balance. Excessive assistance could lead students to copy the teacher's formulation, while insufficient assistance could leave weaker writers waiting without progress.

Vocabulary and sentence construction were also recurring difficulties. Students with stronger reading habits had more linguistic models available for writing, while students with limited reading experience required more concrete support. This finding is consistent with the relationship between reading and writing because reading supplies vocabulary, syntactic patterns, genre knowledge, and ideas that can later be recruited during composition.

Differentiation does not require entirely separate lessons. The teacher can prepare one topic with three levels of support: a detailed who-where-when-what frame for students needing

substantial assistance, a lighter mind map for developing writers, and an open planning space for more independent writers. Optional word cards and linking words can be available to all students. Short rotating conferences can further distribute teacher attention without stopping the rest of the class.

Multicomponent writing research suggests that students with weaker initial skills may gain particularly from explicit and structured instruction (Kim et al., 2021). The implication is that differentiation should vary the amount of scaffolding while keeping the same underlying writing goal.

A Thirty-Minute Window Shifted Attention from Process to Completion

The teacher reported approximately thirty minutes for students to complete a composition. Within that time, students were expected to find ideas, form sentences, write, and reread. Some students completed the task, while others submitted unfinished work. This time structure made it difficult to provide equitable individual guidance and left little opportunity for revision or editing.

The central issue is not that every writing task must be lengthy, but that different stages serve different learning purposes. A realistic approach is to distribute the process. The first segment or meeting can focus on reading a model, examining a picture, discussing an experience, selecting key words, and building a plan. The next segment can focus on drafting, rereading, peer or teacher feedback, and revision. This arrangement also allows the teacher to concentrate on fewer assessment criteria at one time.

Dialogic writing research supports the value of talk and rewriting rather than a single attempt at production. Bouwer and van der Veen (2024) found that an integrated cycle of writing, discussion, and rewriting can improve writing in upper elementary settings. Although the grade level and intervention context differ, the principle is useful here: time for reconsideration is part of writing instruction, not an optional activity after the real work is finished.

Assessment Did Not Yet Consistently Produce Actionable Revision

Student work was collected whether complete or incomplete, but the available evidence did not show regular use of an analytic rubric separating content, organization, vocabulary, sentence quality, spelling, and punctuation. Nor was there a consistent cycle in which students were required to revise after receiving feedback. Follow-up focused more on general reading motivation, explanation, and grouping.

Assessment would become more instructional if it identified a small number of priorities that students could act on. A simple five-part rubric could include relevance of content, sequence of ideas, vocabulary, sentence clarity, and conventions. The teacher does not need to mark every error. A focused response such as one strength plus one priority can preserve motivation while directing revision.

Evidence from writing feedback research indicates that feedback can improve writing when it is aligned with the targeted outcome and when students engage with it during revision (Scherer et al., 2024). Ballock and McQuitty (2023) also show that expert response to student writing involves diagnostic reasoning rather than mechanical correction. For elementary instruction, this supports a selective feedback approach that prioritizes developmental needs and preserves time for students to use the comments.

Teacher Difficulties Were Produced by Interacting Internal and External Conditions

Internal factors were related to pedagogical readiness and instructional decision making: limited variation in process-writing strategies, challenges in developing worksheets and media, time management, differentiated support, and analytic assessment. These factors should not be read as evidence that the teacher lacked effort. The teacher was already using contextual topics,

pictures, reading, discussion, and motivational strategies. Rather, the evidence indicates a need for practical examples, collaborative planning time, and professional learning focused on the writing process.

External factors included mixed student ability, limited vocabulary, uneven reading habits, variable attention, limited materials, class size, and restricted instructional time. These conditions amplified the difficulty of individual support. The central interpretation is that teacher difficulty is relational. It emerges when instructional demands exceed the combination of available time, materials, routines, and support.

School-level support can reduce this burden through a shared bank of picture sequences, word cards, model texts, process-oriented worksheets, analytic rubrics, and graded reading materials. The goal is not technological sophistication. Reusable low-cost materials can be highly effective when they directly address recurring classroom problems. Technology should be selected when it simplifies planning, drafting, or feedback rather than because digital media are assumed to be inherently superior.

Existing Teacher Efforts and a More Coherent Improvement Sequence

The teacher already used several productive strategies: contextual themes, pictures, shared reading, question and answer, reading motivation, and group discussion. These practices provided students with content and language resources. The main improvement needed is stronger sequencing so that each activity contributes directly to planning, drafting, feedback, or revision.

A practical process can begin with five questions: who is involved, where and when does it happen, what happens first, what happens next, and how does the writer or character feel? Students then convert answers into key words or a small mind map. The teacher models one or two sentences, students draft independently with differentiated supports, and the class rereads using a short checklist. Feedback focuses on one or two priorities, followed by a brief revision.

The study's main contribution is therefore a reframing of teacher difficulty. The problem is not simply limited media, limited student motivation, or limited teacher skill. It is the coordination problem created by process writing, heterogeneous learners, short instructional time, and assessment demands occurring simultaneously. This reframing leads to more realistic recommendations because improvement can be distributed across classroom routines and school support rather than placed solely on the individual teacher.

Table 2. Synthesis of Teacher Difficulties, Contributing Factors, and Improvement Needs

Dimension	Empirical indication	Dominant factor	Improvement need
Planning	Worksheets and media did not consistently guide the full writing process.	Preparation time and limited process-oriented resources	Staged prewriting-drafting-revision worksheets and reusable stimulus bank
Implementation	Explanation and assignment were more visible than modeling of the writing process.	Instructional routine and class management demands	Teacher think-aloud modeling and guided writing
Scaffolding	Students varied in ideas, vocabulary, sentence construction, and speed.	Mixed initial ability and reading experience	Differentiated planning frames and small-group conferences
Time	Approximately 30 minutes was insufficient for all stages for many students.	Fixed period and multiple support needs	Distribute writing across stages or meetings
Assessment	Analytic criteria and structured revision were not consistently visible.	Assessment workload and time	Short analytic rubric, priority feedback, required revision
System support	Materials were functional but limited and teacher-created.	Resource and collaboration constraints	Shared bank of media, worksheets, model texts, and rubrics

Source: Research data (2026)

The proposed improvement sequence is also consistent with recent evidence on differentiated and self-regulated writing instruction. Primary-school feedback is more useful when it is dialogic and helps pupils monitor a text and decide what to do next (Fiskerstrand & Gamlem, 2023). Recent studies and reviews of differentiated instruction similarly indicate that varying the level of support can accommodate differences in readiness without changing the core learning goal (Putri & Elizar, 2025; Mulyawati & Ristiani, 2025). Indonesian elementary research also reports benefits from differentiated writing instruction for descriptive or creative tasks (Nurngaini & Maisaroh, 2025; Selvira et al., 2025). These studies strengthen the interpretation that practical differentiation, focused feedback, and protected revision time are complementary rather than separate solutions.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The Grade IV.B teacher experienced interconnected difficulties in planning, implementing, guiding, timing, and assessing simple composition writing. Planning difficulties centered on developing worksheets and media that guide students through prewriting, drafting, revision, and editing. During instruction, the teacher needed to support idea generation, vocabulary, sentence construction, event sequencing, attention, and mixed ability within the same lesson. A writing period of approximately thirty minutes often shifted emphasis toward completing a product rather than learning through revision. Assessment was further constrained by the absence of a consistently documented analytic rubric and revision cycle. The findings indicate that teacher difficulty is best understood as an interaction between pedagogical demands and available classroom support. Existing practices such as contextual themes, pictures, shared reading, questioning, and group discussion provide a useful foundation, but they need to be connected through a clearer writing-process sequence.

Limitations

The study involved one main teacher informant and one Grade IV classroom, so the findings are context-specific and should not be generalized statistically. Student writing was used as supporting evidence rather than subjected to systematic quantitative scoring, and the observation period did not permit analysis of long-term changes in teacher practice or student writing development. The study also did not include interviews with school leaders, parents, or multiple teachers who might clarify institutional and home-literacy influences.

Recommendations

Teachers should use process-oriented worksheets, short think-aloud demonstrations, differentiated planning supports, and a writing schedule that protects time for revision. Assessment can be simplified through a concise analytic rubric and focused comments that students are required to use. Schools should create shared banks of model texts, picture sequences, vocabulary cards, worksheets, and rubrics, and provide regular collaborative planning opportunities. Future studies should include several teachers and schools, observe repeated writing cycles, analyze student drafts and revisions systematically, and examine how teacher professional learning and school resource support change the balance between instructional difficulty and effective writing practice.

Author Contributions

Febriyanti Putri Pamungkas contributed to research conceptualization, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of the findings, manuscript preparation, scholarly revision, and approval of the final manuscript. This statement should be checked by the author before submission and adjusted if supervisors or additional contributors are formally included as coauthors.

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